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A sampling of Fortune 500 companies shows most American corporations are adopting measures to control smoking in the workplace, according to a survey released Tuesday by the Smoking Policy Institute.

The Seattle-based, non-profit institute said 79 percent of the companies responding to written and telephone interviews indicated that smoking in the workplace is perceived as enough of a problem to warrant restrictions.

Those companies have policies or programs concerning smoking, said Robert Rosner, executive director of the institute, which assists corporations and other organizations to resolve problems created by smoking.

Among the companies that have hired the 4-year-old institute to develop smoking policies are Pacific Northwest Bell and Rainier Bancorporation, according to Jennifer Pepino, the institute's assistant director.

''We don't conduct clinics, or insist on a totally smoke free environment,'' Pepino said. ''Our main concern is educating corporations to understand the implications of smoking in the work place and help them to develop smoking control policies.

''We are not anti-smoking. Smokers have the right to smoke and non-smokers have the right not to smoke, so we want environments where there is no involuntary smoking.''

The institute's study relied on information provided through written questionnaires and follow-up telephone interviews with medical directors of 50 of the Fortune 500 companies since June.

The study found that the primary motivation for companies to adopt smoking-control policies is the growing number of smoking ordinances passed by local governments. Secondary motivators were the companies' concern for the health of employees and complaints from non-smoking workers, the study indicated.

Rosner said the survey also revealed that companies have been haphazard about putting smoking policies into effect.

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''Our experience with corporations that have successfully restricted smoking suggests that there is a clearly defined process to follow that minimizes problems and ensures trouble-free policies,'' he said.

''Frankly, we see most companies utilizing a band-aid approach that only prolongs a corporation's struggle to find an effective solution to its problem.'' Rosner said corporations fail to make initial surveys of employee attitudes about smoking or carefully study ventilation requirements that are necessary for separating smokers and non-smokers.

Of the responding companies, 83 percent said they had encouraged employees to join quit-smoking programs and 66 percent said company-funded quitting programs had been made available to workers.

However, only 34 percent said management had initiated research on the implications of smoking in the workplace.

No more than 15 percent of the companies said they had discussed smoking policies with union groups before implementing them and only 30 percent said they had surveyed their workers to see what they wanted.

Officials of most companies -- 72 percent -- indicated they had instituted smoking policies after smoking-control laws were passed by local governments. The company policies generally are the minimum required by legislation, the report indicated.

The study said the most common corporate smoking policy descriptions were: ''smoking allowed with some restrictions,'' ''special areas provided for smokers,'' and ''smoking allowed in designated areas only.''

The institute reported that there appeared to be ''a relationship between stringent smoking policies and higher levels of employee participation and success in smoking cessation programs.''

The report said one company reported the smoking rate among its employees dropped from 39 percent to 13 percent after it instituted a total ban in work areas.

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